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Financing of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in the Middle East: United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

Budget for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to paragraph 2 of resolution 55/264 of 14 June 2001, in which the General Assembly reaffirmed its request to the Secretary-General to continue the process of improving the working conditions of the local staff of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), including by making allowance for difficulties resulting from the relocation of the headquarters of the Force from Damascus to Camp Faouar, through mutual and fruitful dialogue.

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I. Background

1. In 1994, the headquarters of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) were relocated from Damascus to Camp Faouar, which is some 60 kilometres from Damascus.

II. Measures taken to improve the working conditions of local staff

2. In resolution 54/266 of 15 June 2000, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to expedite the process of improving the working conditions of the local staff of the Force, taking into account the difficulties arising from the relocation of the Force headquarters from Damascus to Camp Faouar, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

3. In this regard, it is recalled that the salaries and conditions of service of locally recruited staff of the United Nations common system are addressed within the context of the Flemming Principle, which is applied through reference to the best prevailing local conditions. The salaries and conditions of service of locally recruited staff of UNDOF serving at Camp Faouar are based on the salaries, allowances and benefits paid by the best employers found in the capital city, Damascus, the only place where local staff for the Force can be recruited due to the isolation of the locality of Camp Faouar.

4. As reported to the Assembly (see A/54/732 and A/55/778), the following measures have been taken to improve the working conditions of local staff:

(a) Provision of transportation between Damascus and Camp Faouar at no charge to UNDOF staff; this exemption from transport charges was intended to ease the situation of those staff members whose daily commuting distance and time increased following the relocation of UNDOF headquarters from Damascus, their continued place of residence;

(b) At the same time, a transportation benefit is factored into the net salaries, in accordance with the salary survey methodology, as transportation assistance provided by the comparator employers in Damascus to their employees is taken into consideration in the review of the conditions of service of UNDOF local staff at the location; it is, however, recognized, that such a benefit is based on transportation costs within the city of Damascus and that such amounts would not suffice to cover transportation costs to and from Damascus to Camp Faouar;

(c) Introduction of a reduced-price menu for local staff due to the absence of appropriate restaurant/eating facilities in Camp Faouar;

(d) Provision of a separate break facility for all UNDOF staff, including local staff;

(e) Installation of air-conditioning in all offices;

(f) Granting of international Internet access and local e-mail accounts to all local staff members, except tradesmen and manual workers.

5. At the time of the latest comprehensive salary survey, which was conducted in Damascus in 2000 under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the designated lead agency for local salary issues in the Syrian Arab Republic, there was an overall increase in net salary of 5.6 per cent for staff in the General Service category. In 2001, the interim survey resulted in an overall increase in net salaries of 8 per cent for staff in the General Service category. These adjustments in the net salaries of locally recruited staff in Damascus reflect the salaries, allowances and benefits paid by the best employers in that locality and these same increases have been applied to the UNDOF locally recruited staff serving at Camp Faouar.

6. The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/264 of 14 June 2001, reaffirmed its request that the Secretary-General continue the process of improving the working conditions of the local staff of UNDOF. In paragraph 3 of the above resolution, the General Assembly noted that its resolution 54/266 had not been fully implemented, in particular with regard to making allowance for the difficulties resulting from the relocation of the headquarters of the Force from Damascus to Camp Faouar and, in this regard, requested the Secretary-General to take concrete measures to ensure the full implementation of the matter and to report thereon to the General Assembly.

III. Further measures taken to improve the working conditions of locally recruited staff

7. With a view to identifying other means, within the United Nations Rules and Regulations, of improving the conditions of service of locally recruited staff serving at Camp Faouar, the Office of Human Resources Management consulted with the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). In response, the Executive Secretary of ICSC noted that all relevant allowances and benefits had been taken into account by the Office of Human Resources Management, in accordance with the methodology, in establishing the United Nations General Service salary scale for Damascus. He also noted the significant amount of flexibility that had already been exercised by the Office in determining the conditions of service for locally recruited staff serving at Camp Faouar.

8. ICSC also confirmed that it would not be possible to pay an ad hoc monthly bonus to compensate for the increased commuting time for local staff serving at Camp Faouar within the framework of the salary survey methodology.

9. With respect to the possibility of paying overtime to local staff serving at Camp Faouar for the one hour commuting time to and from work, this would be inconsistent with the policy on overtime and compensatory time off, as embodied in staff rule 103.12 (a) and appendix B to the Staff Rules.

10. Notwithstanding the above, it is recognized that local staff at UNDOF have experienced a change in conditions of service due to the relocation to Camp Faouar, which have resulted in longer hours of work-related activities.

IV. Conclusions

11. **In view of the General Assembly's request that the Secretary-General should continue the process of improving the working conditions of the local staff at UNDOF, and in light of the special conditions prevailing for staff serving at Camp Faouar, the Secretary-General would be prepared to elaborate a separate salary scale for Camp Faouar. This scale would take into account the absence of a local labour market in the close vicinity of Camp Faouar and would assist UNDOF in attracting and retaining staff recruited from Damascus. This scale would recognize the increased amount of time spent on work-related activities, thus reflecting a longer work-week than that on which the Damascus salary scale is based. The financial implications for such a scale amount to approximately US$ 83,000 per year. The above proposed measure has been fully discussed with ICSC, which has indicated that such a course of action would be within the methodology.**

12. **The Secretariat believes that the progressive improvement of the working conditions in Camp Faouar since 1995, together with the separate salary scale, would constitute a full response to the request of the General Assembly as set out in its resolution 55/264.**